SOME FACTS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION AND MOVEMENT OF THE PINDARI ARMY

By

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The Pindaris were a horde of marauders who probably never intended to settle anywhere. To quote Sydenham, the British Resident at Berar, "They (Pindaris) are incapable of formal engagement ; they have no regular system of interest or policy to pursue ; they have no form of government to defend..."[1] They aimed at no conquests. Plunder was their principal object.[2] For that purpose they maintained a large army. A very important feature of the Pindari army was their intangible nature as a result of which it was difficult to obtain correct information about their position and numbers.[3] Consequently when the British started military operations for their suppression they experienced a lot of difficulty in giving any precise instruction for their attack.[4] The Pindari army composed all classes and description of people who, either for want, or disaffection, were induced to join it, thus becoming part of a community which had no means of subsistence except as murder and robbery.[5] As Walker wrote to Jones, "They (Pindaris) belong to no particular caste but are men attracted by the hopes of adventure and plunder..."[6] Though men of every caste and creed were welcomed within the fold of the Pindari fraternity, Malcom had noticed that almost all the Hindus among them were of low classes whose usual occupation was to bring grass and firewood to their camps.[7] Muslims appear to have formed the majority of the Pindari army. Generally the horsemen discharged from the service of regular governments who wanted employment and subsistence used to join one of the *durrahs* (camps) of the Pindaris with the result that "no vagabond who has a horse and a sword at his command can be at a loss

1. Sydenham Report.
2. Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India*, Vol. 1, p. 433.
3. Blacker to Adam, Foreign Secret Consultation No. 62 dated 19 Dec 1817.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Sydenham Report.
6. Walker to Jones, *Report of the Select Committee*, 1832, Vol. 8, p. 320.
7. Malcom, *op., cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 177 fn.

for employment."[8] Thus their ranks were consisted of miscreants expelled from society, and men pursued by their creditors, as well as by men weary of peaceful occupation and eager for excitement.[9]

It is evident, therefore, that recruitment to the Pindari army was made indiscriminately. A horse and a sword were deemed sufficient qualification for admission into Pindari ranks.[10] A common interest in plunder kept them united.

The Pindari army was divided into the following categories :—

1. Durrah—was the term used to denote the camp or tribe commanded by the Sardar or chief.[11]

2. Lubher or Lubhur—was the term they used for one of the expeditionary parties and the chief who commanded it was designated Lubheree or Lubbriah.[12]

3. Tokhdar—was the name they gave to chief who commanded from 500 to 1000 horses.[13]

4. Muhaldar—was one who commanded from 100 to 500 horses.[14]

5. Foyjewalla—was inferior to the above categories.[15]

When the Pindaris set out on an expedition, they placed themselves under the leadership of one or more chosen chiefs named Lubbriah.[16] These Lubbriah were selected on account of their knowledge of the country that it was meant to plunder. When an expedition was decided upon, the Lubbriah moving out with his standard was the signal for the march.[17]

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8. Sydenham Report.
9. Marshman, *Abridgement of the History of India*, p. 305.
10. An Officer, *Origin of the Pindaris*, 1818, p. 94.
11. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. 430.
12. Fitzclarence, *A Route Across India Through Egypt to England*, 1818, p. 9.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Malcolm; *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 430.
17. *Ibid.*

When they proceeded on their predatory excursions they were joined by such large number of temporary adherents during their progress, that the original number of the Lubher was nearly doubled.[18]

They generally obeyed and looked up to their chiefs but it appears that the Pindari forces were not governed by such strict disciplines as is the case with modern armies.[19] When questioned on this point, Kundoo Pindari reported thus, "We are nominally under the orders of a particular chief termed Lubhureu (or Lubheree) but if any person chooses to separate from the main body, no notice is taken of it."[20]

There were perhaps no arrangements for giving any medical aid to the injured or helping those who were left behind due to fatigue, illness or any other reason. On this point Kundoo Pindari's reply was, "We march off in a body and continue so long as we can ; those who fall in the rear are left to their fate; we never stop to defend them."[21]

We do not have any detailed information with regard to the dress of the Pindari horseman. But from the study of the report of the Cumbum Commission which had made investigations about the Pindari raids in Guntur and other places in 1816, it appears that their dress consisted of a quilted Jacket, which came below the knee, their turbans were tied on with a handkerchief. Some of them wore quilted caps which were made to fasten under the chin. Their drawers were composed of thick coarse cloth.[22] Amir Ali,* however, informs us that in Chitu's party each leader of the Durrah surpassed the other in richness and martial air of his horse.[23] On the basis of this we may conclude that the dress of the Pindari forces (when they were ready to march) was impressive and different from the one usually worn.

The Pindari horsemen took particular care to keep themselves fit and agile, which was essential for their profession. During leisure hours

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18. Mc Naghten, *Memoir of Military Operations of the Nagpur Subsidiary Force,* 1820, p. 116.
19. Fitzclarence, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
20. Evidence of Kundoo Pindari cited in Selection from *Asiatic Journal,* Vol. 5, p. 210.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Report of the Cumbum Commission,* para 24.

*Amir Ali was thug and was for sometime in the camp of the famous Pindari leader Citu.

23. Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug,* 1893, p. 276.

they performed a number of exercises. Dwelling was the most popular form of the exercise with them. In Taylor's book we have a very interesting account of how Amir Ali fought a duel in Chitu's camp as a result of which he won the favour of the latter.[24]

The Pindaris were generally armed with a spear in the use of which they were very expert.[25] The spears were made of bamboo and were from twelve to eighteen feet long.[26] Some of them also carried a sword and a shield.[27] A great portion had no weapons other than iron pointed sticks, which were chiefly intended for the purpose of digging up buried property.[28] But as fire-arms were sometimes indispensable for the attack on villagers, about 5% were armed with matchlocks.[29] Some of the principal Sardars carried pistols.[30] All were mounted though not equally well. In the opinion of Prinsep, out of a thousand, the portion of good cavalry might be four hundred. Nearly four hundred were plunderers, indifferently mounted and the remaining two hundred were slaves, attendants and camp followers.[31]

The Pindari forces were always mounted, but their horses like those of the Cossacks were small and extremely active.[32] "They ordinarily marched thirty or fourty miles a day, but in case of extraordinary emergency they were capable of accomplishing fifty or even sixty miles a day."[33] To effect these extraordinary exertions, they were accustomed to sustain the vigour of their horses by spices and stimulants.[34] Opium was a very popular form of stimulant.[35] The Pindaris gave some special type of feeds to their horses so that these beasts might be able to undertake long journey without being exhausted. The horses were generally fed on *chenna jowari* and *tooree* in addition to a preparation of

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24. *Ibid.*
25. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p, 417.
26. Prinsep, *History of Political and Military Transactions in India during the Administration of the Maraquess of Hastings*, Vol. 3, p. 312.
27. *Report of the Cumbum Commission*, para 24.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Mc Naghten, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 38,
30. Evidence of Kundoo Pindari, op. cit.
31. Prinsep, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 38.
32. An Officer, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
33. Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India*, Vol. 4, p. 428.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Fitzclarence, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

opium, arsenic, and other ingredients.[36] Besides this, they shod their horses before they set out so that they could withstand the journey well.[37]

When on their march, the Pindaris carried very light luggage besides their arms and were never encumbered by tents or baggage.[38] Their saddles served the purpose of beds also.[39] Each man provided himself with a few cakes of bread for his sustenance and a few feeds of grain for his horse, trusting much to the chance of plunder for the means of supplying wants of both. When questioned as to how they managed with such small provisions, Kundoo Pindari's reply was, "We mutually assist each other depending entirely on what we can procure in the villages on our route.[40]

When the Pindaris were out on predatory excursions, the party which usually consisted of two or three thousand good horses with a proportion of mounted followers advanced at the rapid rate of forty to fifty miles a day, neither turning to the right nor left till they arrived at their place of destination.[41] They made long and successive marches and did not halt except to refresh themselves or to collect their plunder or else to "indulge their passions of lust and cruelty".[42] The Pindaris generally halted during the heat of the day in the plundered villages or under the shade of a tree both during night and day. They were generally in motion.

In plundering expeditions the best of the horses formed covering parties and they did not burden themselves with spoil. The body was intended to be ready on alarm to collect at any point in order to face the enemy while the plundering parties were marching off with what they had collected.[44]

They made surprise raids in order to avoid premediated oposition and before a force could be brought against them they had taken to their heels. To quote Sydenham, "They retire with nearly the same

36. Evidence of Kundoo Pindari, *op. cit.*
37. Fitzclarence, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
38. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 430.
39. *Report of the Cumbum Commission*, para 24; Sydenham Report.
40. Evidence of Kundoo Pindari.
41. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 430.
42. Sydenham Report.
43. Mc Naghten, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
44. *Calcutta Review*, June 1963, p. 214.

rapidity as they approach and they have generally reached their stronghold and secured their booty before a government can adopt any actual measures to repel them".[45]

The Pindaris were not in the habit of making an attack on any body of troops, howsoever comparatively small that might be. On the contrary their utmost exertions were invariably employed to avoid an encounter.[46] In the words of Sydenham who had carefully studied their character and habits, "They avoided fighting for they came to plunder, not to fight.[47]

Whenever an attempt was made to strike a blow at the Pindaris they were able to defeat it by the promptitude of their movement in retreat. If pursued they made marches of extraordinary length by roads almost "impracticable for regular troops".[48] If overtaken, they dispersed and re-assembled at an appointed rendezvous.[49] In all their marches, both going and coming, they avoided high roads and proceeded by the unfrequented paths.[50]

Therefore, it was almost impossible to overtake the Pindari horsemen. But there was one circumstance in which they could be overtaken without much difficulty. When they were returning from plundering excursions they used to be encumbered with heavy booty and so they could not easily elude the pursuing troops. Kundoo Pindari also corroborated it when in answer to a question on this point he replied that they could be overtaken on their return from expedition because at that time they were incapable of making rapid marches as at first, their horses being fatigued by journeys and encumbered with loads.[51]

When the work of plundering was over, the Pindari horsemen withdrew like beasts to their lairs. Then a change of scene took place. The operation of plunders was exchanged for that of "huckstering".[25] The scene that followed resembled a fair. The plundered goods were

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45. *Sydenham Report*.
46. Political letter to Court, dated 7 July, 1817.
47. *Sydenham Report*.
48. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp; 430-31.
49. *Ibid.*; Thornton; *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 503.
50. Evidence of Kundoo Pindari.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Burton, R. G., *The Maharatta and Pindari War*, p. 5.

exposed for sale.[53] Purchasers flocked from all quarters proximate and remote, the business of the sale being conducted principally by women. While the women were thus busy in disposing of their husbands' property the men were engaged in hearing music, seeing dance and drolls and drinking.[54] Thus passed the life of Pindari in an alteration of brutal exertion and sensual abandonment.

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53. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
54. *Ibid.*; Malcolm; *op. cit.*, p. 178.